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Ninth Person Pleads Guilty in Credit Card Scheme - Another Ring Participant is Sentenced For His Role in the Crimes -

WASHINGTON - One person pled guilty and another was sentenced today for their roles in a credit card fraud scheme, U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. announced.

Both defendants appeared before the Honorable Henry H. Kennedy, Jr. in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. They were part of a ring that stole identifying information, obtained credit, and/or accessed victims' existing bank accounts. The ring's members purchased merchandise and paid bills with the stolen credit and bank accounts.

Michael Simmons, 41, of Bowie, Md., pled guilty to first degree theft. Under federal sentencing guidelines, he faces a likely sentence of up to six months of incarceration. Simmons is the ninth person to plead guilty in the investigation. He is to be sentenced September 8, 2011.

Anita Edwards, 30, of Washington, D.C., was sentenced to five years of probation after earlier pleading guilty to first degree theft. Judge Kennedy also ordered her to perform 100 hours of community service.

According to information submitted to the court by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri L. Schornstein, Simmons and Edwards played roles in a highly sophisticated identity theft and credit card fraud ring that operated in the Washington, D.C. area from December 2006 through March 2010. All told, the ring's activity involved more than 179 corporate and individual victims and approximately \$1.2 million in fraudulent transactions.

One of the participants in the scheme enlisted Edwards to permit her District of Columbia residential addresses to be used for the receipt of packages shipped from various third-party vendors. The packages contained assorted merchandise purchased with fraudulent credit accounts. In addition, Edwards and Simmons were both "customers" of the participant. They would pay half of the face value of certain bills in exchange for the full bill being paid with stolen credit cards or stolen bank account.

Edwards had a Target credit card paid in the amount of \$2,000 and she received a \$500 gift card for Victoria's Secret. Target discovered that payments on the account were made from various credit cards and reversed the charges. The gift card proved to be non-functional. Simmons had about \$1,600 in bills paid through the fraudulent transactions.

The investigation was conducted by the Washington Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the District of Columbia Inspector General's Office, the Washington Field Office of the U.S. Secret Service, and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

In announcing today's developments, U.S. Attorney Machen commended the work of D.C. Office of Inspector General Special Agent Bernadette Todd Atwater, Postal Inspector Dean Davis, U.S. Secret Service Special Agent Chris Macomber, and MPD Detective Michael Pavero, as well as the staff of the U.S. Attorney's Office, including Legal Assistant Jared Forney. He also commended Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri L. Schornstein, who is prosecuting the cases.

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